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Unusual Sightings near Boni National Reserve

Boni Bush Shrike front view (above). PHOTO: T. MWINAMI.
(Inset) a field sketch of the Boni Bush Shrike. ILLUSTRATION: F. NG'WENO.

By F. Ng'weno

Boni and Dodori National Reserves in the far east of Kenya, and Boni and Lunghi forests between them, are little-explored but biodiversity-rich. A team from National Museums of Kenya and Nature Kenya carried out a brief bird survey in the area last month. Exciting sightings included mammals such as the endangered Aders's Duiker and newly found Sengi (Elephant-shrew). Several birds were range extensions, and one bush shrike could not be identified from the guide books.

The team comprised Timothy Mwinami, Martha Ngala, Sandy Oduor, David Ngala, Fleur Ng'weno and three guides/guards from the Awer community. Simon Musila of NMK is advisor to this Conservation Leadership Program project.

On 6 November 2013 at about 7 am, the team reached Banahalisi, an area of low Acacia woodland interspersed with patches of dense scrub on white sand, on the road between Mangai village and Kiunga town.

A loud crackling call that we did not recognize exploded like a firecracker from the bushes. We found the bird making the call, observed and photographed it. Several birds were observed throughout the day. The next day we tried to catch the bird in a mist net, but the bird avoided the net by flying over it – three times.

The bird was a bush shrike, the size and stance of a Tropical Boubou or a Tchagra: fairly big, with a relatively large head and medium-long tail. It was basically black above and white below, with a prominent white stripe above the eye and a prominent long white patch along the wing. The crown was edged in black, but grey in the centre, with the grey extending to the nape and upper part of the mantle. One bird had a dull rufous area on the grey nape; the others did not.

These bush shrikes foraged in bushes, on the ground with Rufous Chatterers, and in mid-canopy of acacias. They made several sounds, including the loud crackling, a tac-tac-tac similar to a boubou, and a few musical notes usually answered by a crackling call.

The team was unable to find this bird in *Birds of Africa*, *Birds of Africa South of the Sahara*, or *Birds of the Horn of Africa*. However, Don Turner kindly read my notes and replied: "Your bird is an aberrant form of the Red-naped Bush Shrike, race *kismayensis*, which is common there. Normally it just has a grey back, but clearly the grey has extended on to the nape in place of red."

A quick check of National Museums of Kenya collections revealed only two specimens of Red-naped Bush Shrike, an adult from Somalia and an immature from Kiunga. They looked smaller, with rufous napes, and with more white spots than the birds we saw.

The team therefore plans to catch the bush shrike and take detailed photos and measurements. A report on the survey will be published.

Note: On 2 November 2013 the team made its way through dense thickets on red sand along Sankuri Ridge. There we had brief views of another bird, also a bush shrike, but brown above and white below, with a prominent long white patch along the wing. It foraged on the ground, in bushes and in trees. Our observations were too scanty for a detailed report.

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Proceeds from sales will go towards supporting conservation activities in the Tana River Delta.

Grace Korasu, a member of the Neema Women Group, standing next to the group's beehive shelter at Shirikisho village.

Beekeeping Initiative at the Tana River Delta Gathers Momentum

By J. Mwacharo

The Tana River Delta is a designated Important Bird Area (IBA), a site critical for conservation of birds. It is also a designated a wetland of international importance by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. This ecosystem supports local communities and enormous numbers of livestock, wildlife and water birds.

Today, the Delta's people are learning new skills and activities to earn money while maintaining the ecological balance of the Delta. One of these is beekeeping. Bees, our smallest livestock, make honey – a healthy food with good market value.

If the construction of two beehive shelters at Hewani and Shirikisho villages is anything to go by, it is apparent that the local community is enthusiastic about the beekeeping venture in spite of the many challenges they face.

The construction of the shelters is an initiative by Nature Kenya with funding from UK Aid, aimed at promoting ecological sustainability in the delta through establishment of community nature-based enterprises. With a combined capacity of over 150 beehives, the two shelters now offer beekeepers from the two villages a secure controlled environment for their hives.

Humprey Garise from Hewani explains "beekeeping in this area used to suffer due to vandalism and theft of honey. Beekeepers suffered huge losses and many of them were discouraged."

Garise is a member of the Mademo Beekeepers Association which comprises of 15 members, eight of them women. The association has 67 beehives, 50 of which were purchased by Nature Kenya through an earlier project. One beehive can produce between 20 - 30 kilogrammes of honey per harvest. Under good conditions, harvesting can be done after three months.

Marketing, however, remains one of their biggest challenges. Members mostly sell their unprocessed honey to middlemen at a wholesale price that is slightly below the recommended price.

"With proper processing and packaging facilities and a good marketing strategy, we can supply honey to retail outlets such as shops and supermarkets," says Garise.

The Hewani beekeepers are optimistic of a brighter future ahead, and have plans to purchase more hives and build their own honey collection and processing unit.

The Neema Women Group at Shirikisho village is another community group involved in beekeeping. The group comprises of 29 members who together own 87 beehives.

Early this year Nature Kenya constructed a beehive shelter for the group.

"Some time back we received 40 beehives from Nature Kenya courtesy of funding from Recomap. Honey production was however not doing well as most of our hives were being destroyed by Honey Badgers," says Julia Ziunge, the group's Chairperson. Following the construction of the shelter, this is now a thing of the past, adds Ziunge.

In 2013 the group received an additional 50 beehives bought with funding from UK Aid.
In addition to facilitating the construction of the shelter, purchase of hives and harvesting equipment, Nature Kenya also took some of the beekeepers for training. Grace Korasu, a teacher by profession, is among the group's members who attended a beekeepers training in Naro Moru.

The Walkon Women Group in Walkon village has also ventured into beekeeping as an alternative source of income, in addition to selling milk and goats selling business. The group's members recently acquired 20 beehives and expect to start harvesting honey in January 2014.

New Migratory Birds Flyway Observatory Site launched at Tugumoi

By R. Owako

The Tugumoi Ridge Flyway Observatory Site, the first of its kind in Kenya, offers vantage points for observing migratory birds as they make their way across the Kerio Valley. A flyway is a flight path used by birds during migration. Flyways generally span continents and often oceans. In the Rift Valley, the flyway becomes tunnel-like and birds use it to fly towards the Mau Escarpment and Lake Nakuru. Among the birds that sail on the flyway are Lesser Kestrels, European Honey Buzzards, Common (Steppe) Buzzards, Steppe Eagles, White Storks and Woolly-necked Storks.

The launch of the observatory site took place on November 9 at Tugumoi Ridge in Eldama Ravine, Baringo County, organized by the Baringo and Kerio County governments. Baringo County Chief Warden William Kimosop said the two County governments were committed to protecting the flyway and promoting bird watching in the area. A team from Nature Kenya, led by Rodah Owako – Membership Manager – witnessed the launch. Representatives from BirdLife International and bird experts also graced the event.

Tugumoi village is about 35km west of Eldama Ravine off the Ravine-Nyaru Road through sections of the Lembus Forest. The village stands at about 2500 metres above sea level, with the surrounding area marking the beginning of the Kerio Valley as well as the Tugen Hills and the Keiyo/ Marakwet Escarpment. Riding the valley's thermals, migratory birds flying in from the north exit from this section, making it a vantage point to watch them fly past.

Martha Nzisa trains boys from Tugumoi village on how to use a pair of binoculars to observe birds. PHOTO: R. OWAKO

For updates go to
www.naturekenya.org

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December-January Evening Sky

By F. Ng'weno

Brilliant stars rise in the eastern sky on December evenings, and fill January skies. Brilliant planets travel among the stars this year. Look up at the sky soon after sunset on a clear dark evening to see the stars and planets described below. During the evening, the moon, planets and stars seem ta move towards the west. Actually, it is our Earth that is revolving towards the east.

Comets 2013

Two camets were above the sunrise just before sunrise in mid-November. Comet ISON was close to the horizon. Comet Lovejay was higher in the sky, below the constellation af the Plough. For latest updates check the internet.

Planets, Dec 13 - Jan 14

In December the planet Venus is a brilliant light in the west. Each day Venus sinks lower towards the horizon. This planet travels between the Earth and the sun, so from Earth it seems to rise and then fall back.

Venus disappears into the sunset early in the new year, then rises in the sunrise in mid-January. The crescent moon is near Venus an Jan 2, in the evening; and near Venus on Jan 29, in the morning.

Acrass the sky, the big planet Jupiter rises in the east in the evening, and is visible most of the night. Late at night Jupiter and the brightest stars Sirius and Canopus are a line of three brilliant lights across the sky. The moon is near Jupiter on Dec 19 and Jan 15.

Dec-Jan Stars

The Pleiades, a group af about six bright stars clase together, are in the northeast in December. If you look at the Pleiades through binoculars, you will see many more stars in the group, surrounded by a glowing haze. To the left of the Pleiades, low in the north, is the constellation af Cassiopeia, shaped like a letter M.

To the right of the Pleiades, in the east, is the reddish star Aldebaran. Starting from Aldebaran, can you see several fainter stars making a shape like a cane? This is the Hyades cluster, also warth a look thraugh binoculars. The moan is near the Pleiades Dec 15 and Jan 11 and near Aldebaran Dec 16 and Jan 12.

Beyond Aldebaran, the constellation of Orion - the Hunter or Warrior - is rising in the east. In January it will be prominent in the eastern sky. Look for three bright stars in a row, with four bright stars like the carners af a bax araund them. The highest of these four stars is Rigel, blue-green in colour.

In December the star Achernar is still very bright, low in the south. Below Archernar, look for the Small and Large Magellanic Clauds. These fuzzy, hazy spots like small rounds clauds are galaxies. They are made of millions of stars.

Moon, Dec 13 – Jan 14

Dec 3: new moon; look for a crescent over the sunset on the 4th or 5th. Dec 9: first quarter. Dec 17: full moon. Dec 25: last quarter.

Jan 1: new moon; look for it near Venus on the 2nd. Jan 8: first quarter. Jan 16: full moon. Jan 24: last quarter. Jan 30: new moon.

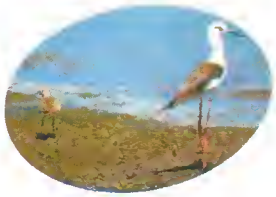
Meteor Showers

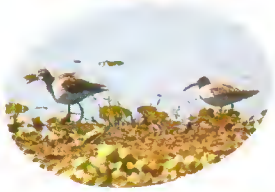
Meteors are bits of dust and rack from space that burn up when they fall in the Earth's atmosphere. They are best seen after midnight when the sky is clear and dark. The Geminid Meteor shawers may be seen from Dec 7 to 17, and the Quadrantids from Jan 1 to 5.

January 2014 Waterbird Counts

Calling all Volunteers

The Ornithology Section of the National Museums Kenya and Nature Kenya, invite volunteers to participate in the January 2014 Waterbird Counts. Volunteers with bird identification and waterbird counting experience or with 4WD vehicles will be given priority. Meals will be provided and we will be sleeping in tents.





Provisional Schedule

Lake Bogoria
Lake Nakuru
Lake Elmenteita
Lake Naivasha
Lake Sonachi
Lake Oloiden
Lake Ol Bolossat
Lake Magadi

For more information please contact:
John Musina and Nicodemus Nalianya,
National Coordinators,
African Waterfowl Census,
Email: mhornbill@yahoo.com or
nicolongclaw@yahoo.com

Nature *Kenya*

Wishes you Happy Holidays

in the FIELD

DECEMBER 2013 AT A GLIMPSE

Dec 4th	Marning Birdwalk
Dec 7th	FoCP Nature Walk
Dec 7th-8th	Lake Bagaria trip
Dec 11th	Morning Birdwalk
Dec 14th	FaNA Guided Nature Walk
Dec 15th	Sunday Birdwatch
Dec 18th	Marning Birdwalk
Dec 25th	Morning Birdwalk
Dec 30th	FoNA Guided Tree Walk

JANUARY 2014 AT A GLIMPSE

Jan 1st	Morning Birdwalk
Jan 4th	FoCP Nature Walk
Jan 8th	Morning Birdwalk
Jan 11th	FaNA Guided Nature Walk
Jan 15th	Marning Birdwalk
Jan 19th	Sunday Birdwatch
Jan 22nd	Marning Birdwalk
Jan 27th	FoNA Guided Tree Walk
Jan 29th	Morning Birdwalk
Jan 30th	FaNA Public Lecture

Bird ringing every Tuesday marning (check with Ornithalogy sectian, Natianal Museums)

Wednesday Marning Birdwalks meet EVERY WEEK at 8:45 am at the back of the Nairobi Museum. The entrance is on Kipande Road.

Sunday Birdwatch (also called "Pot-luck Outings") meet the THIRD Sunday of each month at 9:00 am at the same location. Bring lunch.

Mambasa Birdwalks Contact Marlene Reid through <donreid@africaonline.co.ke> or call 0720-949195 or Doris Schaule <dorischaule@gmail.com> or call 0722277752 for more information.

Contact the office for information on other birdwalks in Kakamega, Kisumu, and other sites

Ngong Forest walks - 1st and 3rd Saturday at 9.00 a.m. Contact Simon 0729-840715

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The office will remain closed from Monday 23rd December 2013 and re-open on 6th January 2014.

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